

DESIGN

Design



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Shaping a World-Leading Brand

“Our goal is very simple: make Nissan the world leader in design. Design is about shaping products that naturally draw the eye, and yet it is also an intangible asset that creates shareholder value and competitive advantage. The power of that attraction translates into a higher selling price. Ultimately, a design’s true worth is measured in profit and the number of cars sold.

At the same time, design is a visual message from the company. The brand’s philosophy must be consistent, because brand value directly relates to profit. Automobiles are my main responsibility, but design—specifically visual brand identity—covers much more than that, including motor shows, showrooms, new car launch events, and even the shareholders meeting. Whether it is through cars, buildings or showrooms, we express a variety of visual messages, but the overall message must be constant and coherent. You must sense the unity and power of the brand.

I am in charge of the Design Center globally. We have seven design centers around the world—three in Japan, two in the U.S., one in Europe, and one in Taiwan. There are

nearly a thousand designers are working together across the globe, with 700 in Japan, 100 in the U.S., 100 in Europe and approximately 30 in Taiwan. For the moment, that’s an ideal mix. We’ve aligned our goals, strategies and processes to unify this international team. Yet we feel there is a definite creative advantage in having each design center maintain its own character and culture. It ensures that fresh perspectives keep coming. We don’t want a uniform viewpoint. We all have the same goal, but there are different ways to get there.

For example, when developing the Z, we put the three main design centers in competition, which was very healthy and stimulating for the entire team. In other cases, we assign the design to one center. The Titan truck was designed and engineered in the U.S. Nissan Design Europe in London often does the same. We also exchange designers, including senior staff, between the different centers. One of the assistant design directors from Nissan Design America is now working in Japan as a chief designer.

We have a simple design decision process consisting of three stages: concept, selection and model freeze. During the initial stage, we gather research data from the Market Intelligence Department and other sources within



Nissan Design America





Nissan. While we consider this data, it is not directly integrated into our designs. If you simply react to opinion surveys, you try to please everybody, and that results in boring cars. We try to tune into the inner voice of the customer, looking into their life and values to discover what they really want. When you're sitting in Japan, for example, it's difficult to know the values of customers elsewhere in the world. Our global design centers bring us closer to that customer. Mr. Ghosn is the chairman of the design decision committee, which includes all the related executives, and they are a source of insight as well.

The Alliance with Renault has been useful in our work. We study each other, benchmark performance, and share best practices. While it is impossible to effectively benchmark against your competitors, the Alliance transparency policy allows us to identify a particular process and examine everything, and Renault can do the same. This leads to new ideas. It's stimulating working with them, but of course neither company wants to turn out the same cars. It's healthy to maintain these differences and our identities. That is what makes the relationship an alliance.

I think we did a very good job during the Nissan Revival Plan (NRP) and NISSAN 180. One of our greatest

successes is that top management made significant investments in design immediately after implementing the NRP. If they hadn't, there would not have been any new products during NISSAN 180. Although the NRP focused on cost containment, management recognized that design was essential in building the cars that people long to own.

That investment continues today. We will soon open the Imagination Factory design center in Japan. We have also expanded the Farmingham center, renovated the San Diego studio, and built the new Nissan Design Europe in London. Nissan has world-leading design facilities and a highly talented and motivated staff. We have no trouble recruiting top designers.

Although we've accomplished a lot, we can never afford to be complacent, especially after the way our competitors have responded to our strong statements in design. While we do have great cars, as a brand Nissan is still not at the top of the industry. You will see more exciting designs from us in the next few years, however, and by 2010 we intend to be the top brand. We are working on that even as we focus on designing profitable models. Contributing to Nissan's sustainable growth is our responsibility as designers, and we take it very seriously."



ZAROOT concept car



AZEAL concept car